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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the utilization of reflective teaching and thinking as a tool to engage teachers in the process of observing, examining, analyzing, and evaluating their philosophy of teaching and learning and their effectiveness as teachers. Research has indicated that reflection encourages teachers to assess critically "What am I doing?," "Why am I doing it?," and "Does it result in increased student learning and achievement?" A more important question is, "Does it help me become a more knowledgeable and effective teacher?" Observations of 22 elementary school teachers support the importance of reflection for teacher improvement. (Author/SLD)

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OBSERVATIONS + CLASS REFLECTIONS = CHANGES IN MY INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

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OBSERVATIONS + CLASS REFLECTIONS = CHANGES IN MY INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the utilization of reflective teaching and thinking by twenty-two teachers as a tool to engage teachers in the process of observing, examining, analyzing, and evaluating their philosophy of teaching and learning and their effectiveness as teachers. Research has indicated that reflection encourages teachers to critically assess "What am I doing? Why am I doing it? Does it result in increased student learning and achievement? More important, does it help me become a more knowledgeable and effective teacher?

INTRODUCTION

"I spent little time reflecting on my teaching...but after observing my colleagues, I played my mental film, weighing what went wrong and what was done right in this class...I find that reflection plays an increasing role in my professional life now."

It seems that most reflections are mental "play-backs" of the day, the kind that many teachers experience. They guides toward different ways of applying what we know based on past events, thinking of solutions to problems, inspiring new ideas, and meditating on an uncomfortable circumstance in the hope of feeling better about it. Our understanding of reflections as a teaching and learning tool take our memory back to that time we invest in the classroom interacting with the students, other teachers, administrators, parents, and overall interacting with our own mode of delivering the information. Through this process it becomes clear that reflection is a crucial aspect of learning and consequently necessary for better teaching. As a teacher becomes more centered on how he or she teaches and how the students learn, the teacher can better focus on ideas, thoughts, and reflections.

Another form of reflection occurs as teachers observe their peers teaching. Observing their behaviors, ways of conducting a class, modes of organizing and delivering a lesson, managing the classroom disruptions, administering the activity time, and taking advantage of those "teaching momentums," help them assess what they do. Schon [1988] refers to this behavior as "reflection on action." The peer observations invite each teacher to examine his or her role in the classroom, how effective the teaching performance is, and how relevant the teaching strategies are to individual students. As Saphier & Gower [1997] indicate, "teaching is one of the most complex human endeavors imaginable." (p.3). The profession of teaching involves not only skills, but attitudes toward it. When a teacher observes others teaching and reflects about it, she is giving herself the opportunity to meditate and contemplate what is being done and how to improve the students' ability to learn. This piece of the process of reflection produces new understandings which could then guide future learning.

Being involved in reflection is an important part of learning [Fedele, 1996]. But, also reflecting by observing others is an important piece of the teaching process. So many good ideas and topics can come during the reflective time. Of course, we can feed our teaching styles by observing what works and what does not work in others' classrooms. In this research, we are introducing teachers observing peers and reflecting on their observations. The analysis is based on the parameters of teaching presented by Saphier and Gower in their book *The Skillful Teacher* [1997]. In addition, the teachers' observations, which took place in 20 Chicago public schools, are structured following the format preconceived by Saphier [1993] in his book *How to make supervision and evaluation really work.*

THE PARAMETERS OF TEACHING

The art of teaching, a complex venture, comprises a multitude of learned skills. A skillful teacher is one who is knowledgeable and aware of the complexity of his job. Skillful teachers should strive to achieve the main goal of creating an atmosphere that is productive and inducive to social and intellectual growth for their students. These people are conscious and methodical about their practices. They juggle choices, self-regulate their teaching, and get feedback to promote positive student outcomes. They monitor their teaching and its effects on learning. Their specific behaviors and/or skills, as displayed by different individuals, are those that are observable and always leave room for improvement. Specific areas or parameters in teaching measure these skills.

The classroom observations the researchers made were based on and adhered to, as much as possible, the fifteen parameters of teaching discussed by Saphier and Gower [1997] and grouped, based on their purpose or function, into *moves*, *patterns*, and *abstractions* of teaching. These parameters can also be classified as *Management Parameters, Instructional Strategies Parameters, Motivation Parameters*, and *Curriculum Planning Parameters.*

The Management Parameters include the basic and prerequisite skills necessary for good teaching to take place in a classroom, supporting and making it possible for good instruction to be performed. The Instructional Strategies come into play with the

interaction of teacher and students, while the class is in progress, thus designing the instruction that goes on in the classroom. These are the ones that bring the content or "meat" so to speak, of the lesson to students in the class. The Motivational Parameters are the ones that attract or capture the attention and interest of the students to what is being taught, and these parameters contribute to the students' ability to stay focused and on task, thus facilitating effective instruction and empowering learning. Ultimately, participating in authentic learning tasks, staying on task, and internalizing knowledge are some essential factors that result in successful learning for students. The Curriculum Planning Parameters are the skills that contain what the authors call "*the blueprints for instruction.*" They stand above all the other parameters and support each and every one of them. Teaching is thus, the combination of all these fifteen parameters. They confirm what effective teaching or instruction and learning should be and what all teachers should strive to achieve, if they believe, that all students can learn demanding academic material at high levels of achievement.

Starting with the assumption of a firm and solid foundation of essential beliefs, the parameters of *Attention*, *Momentum*, *Space*, *Time*, *Routines*, and *Discipline* also fall under the group Management Parameters. Management Parameters are the foundation of teaching, for if they are not handled appropriately, or are absent from the learning and teaching processes in the classroom, learning cannot take place. *Clarity*, the *Models of Teaching*, and the *Principles of Learning* used effectively, and believed in by the teacher fall under the group of Instructional Strategies or parameters, while the *Classroom Climate*, the *Personal Relationship Building* between teacher and students, as well as the *Expectations*, fall under the Motivational Parameters. Finally the *Learning Experiences* or *Activities* that take place in the classroom, the *Design of the class* and the teaching process, the *Objectives* the teacher wishes to accomplish, and the *Evaluation* of the learning experiences, fall under the group of Curriculum Planning Parameters.

NARRATIVE OBSERVATIONS

The theoretical and practical foundations of the narrative observations are based on the work of Saphier [1993]. He suggests four basic elements which must be present in appropriate balance for writing about observed teaching. The narrative components are a proportion of claims, evidence, interpretations, and judgments:

- *A claim is a generalization about a person's teaching.*
- *Evidence is a literal description of something the observer heard or saw to back up the claim.*
- *Interpretations explain why evidence does, indeed, support the claim.*
- *Judgments let the teacher know what the observer thought of the observed event."* [Saphier, 1993, p.39]

What is A Reflective Teacher?

We believe that reflecting on teaching takes place when a teacher knows his/her students well, their likes and dislikes, their ethnic and cultural background, their personalities, and respects and validates their languages and cultures. Also, an effective reflective teacher knows the resources available in the school, district, community, and the families of his students that he can access in order to improve and achieve the objectives of the educational program. A reflective teacher provides for a variety of engaging activities in which students can have many opportunities to learn by listening, speaking, reading, writing, and has hands-on experiences with the content being taught.

Effective teachers must know the difference between teaching and learning, allow time for active teaching in their classrooms, use a repertoire of group arrangements to do class work that may go from lecturing, to small group discussions and projects, to individualized instruction. They use many learning experiences in their classes, cooperative learning, multisensory and multiple intelligences classroom methods, as well as outside world learning activities such as field trips, museum visits, etc.

Reflective teachers often plan their lessons for all their classes, using clearly stated goals and objectives, are constantly evaluating their students' performance, preferably by using portfolio assessments, allot time in appropriate ways, are organized, flexible, and manage classroom routines efficiently. They establish clear rules that are understood by all students, do not take much time from true active teaching (they keep students engaged for at least 75% of the time allocated for academic learning), and match or tailor the curricula and their delivery of instruction to the groups and to particular individuals [Saphier & Gower, 1997].

Effective reflective practitioners help students' develop to their fullest potential, supporting and helping them to become lifelong learners, leaders, independent thinkers, and problem solvers in real life situations. They capitalize on their students' diversity and use it as much as possible, to provide relevance in their classes, and as a guide in purchasing appropriate and relevant textbooks and other resource materials.

Finally, and even more important, a reflective teacher is aware that "taking time and energy to reflect on and improve one's work are essential to the understanding process itself" [Simmons, 1994, p.23]. For this reason, observing others' teaching practices help provide a better understanding about their own. Under this capacity, teachers may realize the critical aspect of their own reflections. They may find that the reflection time is productive, if they take time to properly reflect. Killion & Todnem [1991] said that "busy people typically do not engage in reflection. They rarely treat themselves to reflective experiences unless they are given some time, some structure and the expectations to do so" (p.15). Teachers, too, are busy people. By providing the opportunity to observe their peers, their reflections increased and, therefore, their work performance seemed to improve. This fact is enough to encourage teachers to observe their peers and take time to see themselves in the

mirror of others' practices.

Classroom Observations: *The First Lesson*

The compilation of the classroom observations by teachers was completed by the end of November, 1998. Twenty-two teachers were involved in the process of observing their peers. They were all classroom teachers with different backgrounds and years of experiences, teaching in the Chicago public school system. The observers were trained during 14 weeks, a semester prior to conducting the observations. The training consisted of the application of the teaching parameters in the classroom and the writing of narrative reports. This latter process was critical to the research. We expected the observers (teachers) to comment on all the significant instructional events he/she observed, free of the restrictions of limiting categories. In fact, we encouraged the use of the fifteen parameters of teaching as the basis for their observations. The flow of teaching-learning episodes and their relation to one another was only possible by applying their exposed knowledge on the teaching parameters.

The observers followed the basic structure of the classroom observation write-up composed by claims, evidence, interpretations, and judgments. During the data collection procedures each teacher observed four peers. The sample of observations climbed to 88 classroom observations. For the purpose of this paper, we are presenting a selection of eight classroom narrative observations. In collecting and compiling the observations, each subject participant followed these directions: (1) *setting up the tone of the observation*, asking for appropriate permissions from the administration and the teachers in order to inform them about the research objective of the observations; (2) *planning a pre-conference* with the teachers, making them comfortable with the process by asking them what they would like to specifically be observed on, what were their weaknesses and/or strengths; (3) *observing the process*, sitting in the classroom during 45 minutes writing up literal notes of what transpired during the observation; (4) *communicating the observations to the teacher* by providing specific evidence to back up claims.

Classroom Observations: *The Second Lesson*

After collecting the observations and doing their write-ups, the participants were asked to reflect on what they had observed and to contrast and compare their own teaching practices with those observed. The results of these reflections are gathered in this study.

All teacher observers were aware that observing the performance of a teacher only once or twice, for a limited amount of minutes in one or two days, did not really give the observer a complete and total picture of what that specific teacher knows and is able to do. With that in mind, the generalizations and recommendations that are expressed in this paper, in reference to each teacher observed, should be taken

carefully and not as total and final indictments of any teacher in particular. This is just an exercise in theory and practice. This is just a compilation of observations which enabled teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION WRITE-UPS

Mr. R in the History Department

I met with the Principal of the school and the head of my department to ask for permission to do my observations before I talked to the teachers. I went to Mr. R's classroom and explained to him what I wanted to do. He agreed on the observation, told me the day to show up, and the material he was covering for that day. His class is history and is taught during the second period. The school is a private, catholic, and for "girls only" school. As it is a norm, all classes should start with a prayer and so Mr. R prayed with the class. One of the notorious features and peculiar attributes that this teacher possesses is his style of teaching. People would describe him as a very enthusiastic and interesting teacher in his class. Some people may even say that he is like a comedian or even a clown type of teacher, in a very positive and professional way. As you pass by his classroom, you could hear his loud voice and all the excitement in his teaching. I wanted to experience this and see it with my own eyes.

I arrived to his class and after he finished with his prayer he started with, "where were we yesterday?", in a very happy mood. He was talking about Las Vegas, Nevada and continued with his lesson. To enhance his lesson he told a personal story about him getting married in that city, since that's one of the reasons it's famous for, and the girls listen to him with full attention. Mr. R continued with his story about him getting married in a very enthusiastic, almost funny manner. The girls started asking questions about how it was back then and how different the city was. With this introduction, Mr. R was able to get everyone's attention and at the same time complemented his lesson about that particular state. While he was into his lesson, he was walking around the class making sure everyone was behaving accordingly. The rules in this school are very strict and all the girls must follow these rules. Everyone is to be in full uniform and respect each other at all times. There was one student not seated in a proper manner, almost lying on her desk, and Mr. R said, "get some posture please." The student immediately obeyed the teacher as he continued with his class. He then introduced another state, Colorado. He highlighted the fact that this city is called "Mile High City." He showed a map to the students to make sure they knew where this state was. Giving this lesson he kept adding current events from the daily news about this city that made students relate more to what he was saying or talking about.

Observer's Deliberations

In his class I was able to prove for myself everything I heard about Mr. R. His classroom management is very good. I was able to see how he teaches and his

attention in his class kept the students' interest. I believe that Mr. R used the stories he told to keep the momentum from one topic to the other and the students were engaged by asking him questions. When he was teaching, he kept his voice projection with an appropriate level and it was like listening to a very motivated speaker. He was funny in giving his lesson and made the students laugh and participate at all times with him. The students looked as to be enjoying his class, participated, and asked questions about the topic. The discipline in his class was very good and he only had to say something once to a student for her to do it. The classroom was very conducive to education and was decorated with many pictures of presidents and insightful passages. The time of his class was good since he started right after the bell and didn't waste time in starting the class. Mr. R's personal relationship building with his students was excellent. The respect was mutual. The classroom climate felt good. The students showed confidence when they were participating and asking questions. I truly enjoyed Mr. R class and I thought that I would like to be like him!

Mrs. Isabel, a Third Grade Math Teacher

The teacher was very knowledgeable of the content (multiplication tables) of the mathematics class she was teaching. She started her class with a review of the tables previously studied in class (the table for the numbers 1, 0, 2, and 10). She then proceeded to read out loud to the students a short reading of the Maya Indian's numerical system of small circles or dots and bars. She drew some of the Maya numbers on the chalkboard. The students were seated in straight rows and were attentive and responsive to the teacher's questions and prompts. The teacher proceeded to explain the multiplication table of the number 3 using realia. She had asked them to bring to class a little jar of beans and used them to demonstrate to the students that multiplication was a faster way to add things. She showed them individually to some students and they would try to answer the multiplication fact (e.g. 3 X 7 = ?) And also to the entire group. She used a variety of techniques to explain the lesson. She used the chalkboard to write the table for the number 3 and the students worked on some worksheets in which they completed the multiplication facts. After they spent about 20 minutes discussing the multiplication table of the number 3, they proceeded to study the table of the number 5 for the rest of the class. The teacher kept her students engaged in the lesson. She used a variety of manipulatives, such as beans, the chalkboard, worksheets, etc. The teacher demonstrated sensitivity toward the cultural and historical background of the students in her class. In presenting the reading about the Mayas and explaining who they were, how they invented the concept of zero, etc., the teacher demonstrated a deep knowledge and respect for the culture and the historical background of her students. Many of them seemed very happily surprised about what the Maya Indians had accomplished and seemed to feel very proud that they were from Yucatan and Central America. The teacher had very clear objectives. Not only she did explain to the students what they were going to do on that day, but all through the

lesson, and even without checking her lesson plan book, she showed that she knew what her main purpose was at all times. When presenting my observations, I congratulated her for a wonderful class. I advised her to look into National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.

Observer's Deliberations

Mrs. Isabel is a very humane and conscientious teacher with much experience. She knows how to teach her students well and how to keep them interested in her lessons. She uses the students' previous knowledge experiences to maximize learning in her classroom in a commendable manner and promotes a good learning environment in her classroom. She makes her students feel proud of their culture, their history, and their countries of origin. She demonstrated that she could tailor the learning experiences to the needs of different students by using a myriad of techniques and methodologies to convey the content of her lessons. Her classroom activities, curriculum planning, objectives, and immediate evaluation of proficiency she demonstrated throughout her lessons were extremely well thought out and solid. She knew what she was doing. Her lesson plan book was complete and up date. I would recommend Mrs. Isabel to refresh her classroom organization or management skills in terms of space (re-arranging the students' desks once in a while) and discipline repertoire. There were two class disruptions by two separate students in two different situations during the class and in both, all she did was to tell the students to pay attention and to sit straight.

Mrs. E., an ESL Teacher

The teacher began teaching a lesson in character development. She asked the students, "what do you think the story is going to be about?" Write down in your journals your predictions. She had the students read the story aloud. While they were reading, they would write the words on an index card that they didn't know. This demonstrates that the teacher manages students' time effectively. The teacher was very alert to the needs of the students. This can be seen through the attention the teacher took to guide students to write down the words they didn't know. She gives particular attention to Susan who is a bit confused. In addition, she tells Alex to "stay focused" and redirects his attention to the place in which the students are reading. She comes around Susan and helps her by pointing to one of the words she had difficulty pronouncing. With this action she makes sure that Susan writes down all the words to better understand the content. Thus, she got Susan on track with writing the word on an index card. "Good job Susana." This shows that the teacher handles intrusions with a minimum of disruption to the flow of the lesson and maintains momentum of the lesson.

Observer's Deliberations

I found this observation to be very positive because it allowed me to look at a teacher with a classroom with educational differences and regardless of their lack of English skills they were very positive and wanted to learn. I felt that Mrs. E had all students on task and involved and contributed to an active learning environment. While I honestly came away impressed with the active learning approach to instruction she used, I thought Mrs. E used her teaching skills to promote and provide an effective learning scenario. She maintained attention by maximizing time on task and administrated clarity of presentation through checking and probing for understanding. It's great to see bilingual education still alive today because according to many research studies, bilingual education is almost being exterminated. I feel classrooms should be very relaxing niches for second language learners.

Mrs. J., a Physical Education Teacher

This observation was set up with Mrs. J and the lesson goals were discussed before the observation. She said that the lesson was going to consist of a class discussion on the definition on endurance, how it differs from person to person, how it can be improved, and how the heart responds to exercise. This to be followed by a ½ mile run. The discussion was held inside with 40 children sitting on the center circle in the gym. The total class time was 30 minutes. Mrs. J engaged the entire class in the discussion. She asked,"what types of physical things happen to the body when we run for an extended period of time?" This questioning provided an atmosphere of all children understanding the goal of the activity. My feeling is that when the children understand the "why" of a physical activity it is a motivating factor to giving their best effort. Mrs. J had good control of the class. At one point she walked over to an individual she noticed bothering another during the discussion saying "Billy, keep your hands to yourself." She said this in such a manner that it kept the boy listening without disturbing the flow of the discussion. This was an excellent way to keep the discussion going without giving attention to Billy. Many times a break in the discussion loses many of the children, I this case it did not. She was positive toward all responses. Her response to one answer, "Good answer Max. Gina, can you repeat what Max just said?" Therefore, all children were intent on listening to stay involved in the discussion. There were two reasons for this, one to get the positive response from the teacher. Also, because if she felt you were not paying attention she would call on you to repeat the answer. This showed good control of the class as well.

Observer's Deliberations

The parameters I felt she was strongest on were discipline and personal relationships. The areas I feel that she needed work on were space and time. I was thinking that maybe the momentum of the lesson would have gone better if she had

the entire lesson outdoors so the lesson could have flowed from discussion to activity-demonstration. This would also have affected the time parameter because of the walk from gym to the running area was useless time. I enjoyed observing the lesson very much. The strongest points were the children's interactions with each other during the discussion. I felt they supported one another responses and gained great knowledge about the activity and about the human body.

Ms. G., a Music Teacher

The lesson started at 8:50, the nine children came in the room with an additional child from their homeroom. It was an additional child's responsibility to take attendance up to the homeroom teacher. The first seven minutes of class were filled with confusion and a certain looseness. Ms. G did not seem to have an established set of routines. Students were continually interrupting ms. G, who was getting her material organized, "I don't have a pencil!" "Hey where is my book?" This lack of routine got the class off to an unfocused start. The important first minutes of the class were taken up with administrative tasks instead of learning.

Students started their lesson with Ms. G sharing some limericks she had found at the library over the weekend. She shared three of the limericks with them, with great amusement the kids repeated them. Ms. G had made copies of them so each child had one to take home. Their homework was to share them with at least three people. "Except people in this room," added the teacher as Ryan laughingly turns around ready to tell Jose. Ms. G asked one of the students to put the book in the library section. The special library section of the room had three small tables against the wall. Some books were unattractively displayed and the bulletin board at the back showed pictures, reviews and activities from some of the students' favorite books.

The next activity was reading of the book <u>Fortunately, Unfortunately.</u> Ms. G said, "Today we are going to read a book you are going to love, what do you think it is going to be about?" When nobody answered immediately, she said, "let me tell you," and then told them it was a collection about some events that are considered good turn out bad." She then read the short book, asking questions like, "what do you think will happen next?" and, "how do you think the character is feeling now?" When asking these questions, Ms. G would often not give enough wait time. The lack of appropriate wait time took away the students' opportunity to participate in a meaningful conversation about literature, and also sent the students a negative message regarding Ms. G's expectations for the students.

After this book the teacher announced, "It is time for silent reading, everybody get a book." While everybody got a book and started to read, Ms. G did not give further directions. She did not make any objective clear, silent reading seemed to be an activity to be completed. With this lack of specific objectives Ms. G misses opportunities to underline critical learnings, make connections for students, and to check and evaluate student learning.

Observer's Deliberations

I shared with Ms. G my observations. She told me that she realized that she was not her usual when reading the story to the students and had not used good judgment in waiting for the answers. She explained that she was somewhat anxious with having an observer, since she was a music teacher, who was now teaching reading, a subject area she does not have any previous experience teaching. I agreed with Ms. G and presented to her my observations, claims and evidence. In reflecting on what parameters she needs more work, I concluded that there are three areas: Routine/Momentum, Objectives, and Expectations.

Mrs. J., a Spanish Teacher

I contacted Mrs. J on Friday, October 30 after school and asked if I could observe one of her classes on Monday, November 2. She was thrilled. Before I could ask her if there was anything she wanted me to pay attention to, she asked me to observe her second year Spanish class and keep an eye on her pacing. I observed her third period of class.

She was reviewing the grammar she had presented on Friday on comparatives. J. was aware that students may forget information over the weekend. Therefore, she asked a student to review his notes and state the formulas used in making comparisons in Spanish which she wrote on the board for everybody to see. In doing this, she was able to get students to complete the grammar exercise smoothly. She is also aware that some students may not be "catching on" as quickly as others. Keeping this in mind, she asked those students that had "caught on" already to begin giving examples using comparatives before she asked those students who had not. By doing this, she made sure that the "slower" students were exposed to extra examples of what they are supposed to accomplish. She is also alert to discipline problems. When a student began shouting out answers, she gave him the "look" and told him "I am marking your oral participation grade a zero." thus, she kept class participation running smoothly. She was sensitive to students who hard time with the material. For example, she asked a student to make a comparison and he got stuck. Instead of making him feel uncomfortable by waiting for him to respond, she asked if somebody else could help him.

Observer's Deliberations

Based on what I observed, I noticed that clarity was one of the parameters heavily used. Mrs. J asked students to recall information that had been presented the previous week by having them review their notes. Attention was another parameter used. When a student started yelling out answers, she immediately got his attention by looking directly at him and communicating the consequences for his behavior. Momentum was apparent. She anticipated asking those students who

caught up quickly as others. The parameter of Principles of Learning was demonstrated when she asked the "quicker" students to serve as model for those "slower" Expectations and personal relationships were demonstrated by her verbal expressions of "you know better than that" and "Oh, that's all right. All you need is a little help from your friends."

I think she did a nice job keeping things running smoothly throughout the class. She is great at making the students feel comfortable with new material and she is very effective in making sure that all students are understanding the material. In regards to her pacing, I thought she paced the lesson well. When I left, she was getting started on a different activity.

Ms. C., A Science Teacher

After informing Ms. C about my interest in observing her class, she invited me to be present at a Health Education lesson. She wanted me to observe the students' behavior as they received and reviewed information on sexuality, if they were receptive to the material in a mature way. Also she was concerned if she was delivering the information in a way that all students would feel comfortable.

The students were watching a videotape on the function of some body parts. They were making comments among themselves while watching it. After Ms. C said, "now we're going to review our past lessons." She had poster size pictures of reproductive male and female organs as well as other body parts. She was very confident while showing them to the group and asking questions. Even though the class was engaged in the lesson there was side talking taking place. Apparently it did not bother the teacher since she never lost control of the group. She maintained students' attention. When she asked questions, most of the class answered out loud. When the side talking was too high, she said, " SSSSSS...very softly." This happened a couple of times and the students seemed to respond well to this teacher 's mechanism.

She delivered the lesson offering immediate feedback to the students. She answered their questions and tried to clarify their doubts. Ms. C taught most of the time from the front of the classroom, but she was in touch with the flow of all events. She was aware of the activity taking place in the back of the room. She told a student, who was the very last one at the corner, "if you cannot see from there, please feel free to stand up." The whole class stared at the student for a second. He said, "I am OK." "Good" - said the teacher, and continued with the class. Students constantly called out the responses and every time, she responded with feedback about the content of the comment and never gave the students the idea that they should wait to be called on.

Observer's Deliberations

After my observations, I talked to the teacher who seemed to be too alert to my comments and claims. I learned that her students had the freedom to voice out comments and opinions about the lesson content. They expressed their perceptions

and beliefs, and opinions. I recall the article, *Teaching Democracy by Doing it*, which indicates that decisive issues do not have to paralyze schools. It happened in this classroom. The topic was very sensitive to the age and reactions of the students; however, they felt comfortable responding and interacting with each other and the teacher. I feel that the teacher presented the information in a very natural manner and that it helped the students cope with the challenges presented in the videotape. I would have used equal opportunity activities to assure that all students really participated and to give them clear expectations prior to class. Also, I think I would have tried to connect with old information they bring at the beginning of the class.

Mrs. V., a Writing Teacher

I spoke to Mrs. V, an experience first grade teacher, and asked if I could observe her classroom. She was open to the idea, but preferred that I go another day since she had several non-instructional activities planned for that day. Halloween was being celebrated and it was only a half day of class. We agreed to hold the observation on November 05, 1998.

When I walked in, I noticed that space was used to support the learning environment. Students sat at round and rectangular primary tables in the center of the room. The learning centers, listening, writing, math, reading, and computer, were located throughout the room, but away from the students' tables. The general group active participation area had colorful charts, calendars and graphs. The students' work was prominently displayed throughout the room. The room is arranged to foster to support the instruction.

Expectations were clearly stated. This was evident when she reminded students that they were going to try this writing activity independently. She reminded them that they have done similar activities together, but she knew they could now complete journals independently. She walked around to check how they were doing and praised them for their work. She had individuals students read their entries and compliment them on their excellent work. Therefore, by using praise, encouragement and positive expectancy, Ms. V gave the students courage to try activity independently.

She checked for clarity and understanding. When she walked around and asked recall questions such as "What are we writing about?" and as she walked them through the writing process she asked comprehension questions, "What are we writing first?" a student gave her the date "11-5-98" she asked what 11 meant (month November), what 5 meant (5th day of the month), and 98 (the year 1998). Therefore, with the questions she made sure they understood what they were doing.

Observer's Deliberations

I discussed with Ms. V how much I enjoyed the visit. I complimented her for an outstanding job. I commended her for how well she is able to manage the space in her room. I shared I felt that she clearly expressed her expectations, and she

continuously checks for understanding. I also shared that what I enjoyed most was the cooperative spirit that exists in her room. I encouraged her to continue keeping abreast of new practices. I thanked her for allowing me to observe good teaching practices.

REFLECTING ON THE TEACHERS', OBSERVATIONS, DELIBERATIONS, AND CONTEMPLATIONS

Researchers, as well as an increasing number of educators have determined that some of the most effective strategies for improving teaching involve and include observing, modeling, and reflecting on teaching practices. The deliberations on the observable teaching activities by peers in this study indicate the effectiveness of the process. However, it must be restated that the comments made by the teachers on their observations were made, based on a limited amount of time in observing and that the process was an attempt to put theory into practice. However, in spite of the limitations of time, teachers were still able to use this opportunity to observe, and more important, to reflect on their own practices by using their peers as "mirrors" to look at and examine their personal teaching practices.

The observants utilized the various parameters effectively in their observations and by doing so, they were able to gain some interesting insights into those factors that contribute to and help develop a skillful teacher. They discovered that Management Parameters varied from teacher to teacher and involved various elements, including the personality and style of the teacher.....Mr. R for example. However, they were also able to see that some of the "tried and true" strategies still worked, such as engaging the students in interesting, relevant, and authentic learning experiences, as Mr. R also demonstrated with his engaging dialogue and personal sharing of information about Las Vegas.

The teachers were also able to observe successful, but not necessarily, creative or "out of the box" teaching methods. Again, they observed teachers, such as Mrs. Isabel, who was described as being, "very humane and conscientious." Teachers sometimes have the mistaken notion that they have to be "entertainers or magicians" to attract and maintain students' attention and interests. In reflecting on Mrs. Isabel, the observer realized that it was how Mrs. Isabel used the students' prior experiences to help connect them to learning, and how she demonstrated that she valued them, their culture, and their ethnicity. She displayed sensitivity, understanding, and proven teaching strategies.

Reflection on teaching and learning allows one to reexamine, rethink, and revise current philosophies, beliefs, and practices. This process is an effective approach to ensure that teachers not only understand the need for change, because we live in a society and culture that is in a constant state of change, but that they are willing to make that change. Reflection encourages an evaluative approach to determining how one can become a skillful, knowledgeable, and effective teacher.

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